



A Fresh Start at Oak Park!

Interim Senior Pastor Brian Thorstad

*“Rise up church with broken wings,
Fill this place with songs again,
Of our God who reigns on high,
By His grace again we’ll fly.”*

From “Shout To The North” by Martin Smith

One of the things I love about my role as a “redevelopment transitional pastor” – a fancy new term for an interim pastor who tries to change churches – is the opportunity to see God do mighty things in hurting churches. These are God’s miracles, not mine, but I get a front row seat.

Nowhere has my front row view of God’s goodness, grace and power been better than at Oak Park Community Church in Blaine, Minnesota, where I have served for just over one year.

I started talking to the church’s leaders in May of 2016 after the church had gone through the difficult experience of the rejection by the congregation of a candidate for the long-term senior pastor position. The candidate moved on and has done well but the church was divided, discouraged and confused. Family connections and other factors made the situation sensitive and complicated. The tension in the congregation was palpable.

As a candidate for the interim pastor position, I set before the church my dream of a “united, joyful, effective Oak Park Community Church, calling a new long-term pastor who is an excellent match for the congregation,” but it was not going to be possible for the church’s elders to lead the church forward to unity without considerable fallout.

The fallout came in the fall, just about Thanksgiving, as a matter of fact, when about a third of the congregation left to start a new church nearby.

December was difficult. January was tough too. I challenged the leaders to think in terms of being and doing what a brand new (31 year old!) church would need to be and do. That means: no bitterness, no malice, no resentment and no looking back, except to learn from the past.

A call for prayer from the team of prayer warriors whom Donna and I know from all over the country seemed to be a turning point. A potentially disastrous annual meeting turned out well and everything has been uphill since.

By God’s grace, the “spirit” of our little flock has improved week by week. Donna and I drive to Blaine on Sunday mornings excited (not frightened) about “what’s going to happen today.” New folks are checking us out (and staying) almost every Sunday.

There are three factors that I want to drive home: (1) God has done this, in answer to the prayers of His people, (2) the help of our Regional Director, Pat Phinney, has been crucial, every step of the way, (3) the courageous (and scary!) leadership of our church’s elders was vital.

Moral? Don't be afraid to do the right, though difficult thing and never hesitate to ask God for the impossible, like fresh starts for troubled churches. It's what He does.

Brian A Thorstad is a blogger, consultant, coach, trainer and grandpa, and has served as an interim pastor of seven churches in three states over the past fourteen years. He lives with his wife Donna in Hastings, MN. "Heaven Help Our Church!" and "Redevelopment: Transitional Pastoring That Transforms Churches" are available from nsresources.com or Amazon.com. His website is www.churchwhisperers.org.

